

HISTORY

Casa do Paço (Palace House), once the most important building of Figueira da Foz, was built at the end of the 17th century, to serve as the summer residence of the Bishop of Elvas, Viseu and Coimbra, Dom João de Mello (1624-1704), son of Dom Jorge de Mello and Dona Madalena de Távora. Dom João instituted a *majorat* over the Paço of Figueira da Foz, comprising lands and salt works in the vicinities. The estate associated to the *majorat* was inherited by his nephew, Dom António José de Mello Mendonça, the descendants of which were

counts of Figueira, maintaining the Casa do Paço in the hands of the Mello family up until the first decades of the 19th century. In 1836, Frutuoso José da Silva, a trader from Coimbra, purchases the property, which is sold in 1868 to Manuel dos Santos Júnior, a wealthy landowner from Coimbra, who receives the title of Baron of the Paço of Figueira da Foz. In 1881, the latter carries out the restoration of the building, particularly the important coating of Dutch tiles which attracts scholars' attention.



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Município da Figueira da Foz



CASA DO PAÇO
FIGUEIRA DA FOZ

USEFUL
INFORMATION

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CASA DO PAÇO

FIGUEIRA DA FOZ
Portugal



DUTCH TILES



Casa do Paço is especially relevant due to its unusual collection of single figure Dutch tiles or *enkele tegel*, usually associated to Delft, which cover four rooms of the main floor, amounting to approximately 7,000 samples, with a colour effect typical of the Portuguese tillers. Each tile constitutes a small painting of semi-industrial manufacturing divided into three categories: 1) tiles with rural and maritime **landscapes**, painted in cobalt blue over a white background; 2) tiles with **knights**, amazons, roman emperors and historical figures, with *spinnekopje* corners (spider or small flower), painted in manganese over a white background; 3) tiles with **biblical themes**, with *ossekopje* corners. Many of the motifs represented in these tiles are based on 16th and 17th centuries Dutch painting and on engravings from that period. The tiles might have been produced at the *Delftsevaart* pottery, in Rotterdam, at the beginning of the 18th century, the circumstances which lead to its installation at Casa do Paço being unknown. Among the various theories on its origin, there is a prevalent thesis that tells of a salvage of the cargo of a Dutch frigate which shipwrecked on the beach in 1706, the spoils of which were then auctioned by the Customs House.



Classified as a *Public Interest Building* by Decree of 1967, Casa do Paço is home to one of the largest collections in the world of single figure Dutch tiles. The tiles of Casa do Paço have been considered one of the most beautiful of their kind, thus forming a rare and unusual collection.

ARCHITECTURE

Located opposite the dock of the port of Figueira, Casa do Paço is a building of sunny features, with a U-shaped floor plant, of French inspiration and characterised by stern and strict forms. The monotony of its outer look is only broken by the dome of the turret. The main façade, facing the river, exhibits an elegant and sober baroque style, with its single turret and showing an architectonic resemblance with the north façade of the Convent de Santa Isabel, or

with the Convent of Santa Clara-a-Nova, in Coimbra, a work by Friar João Turriano, carried out under the pastoral supervision of Dom João de Mello. Casa do Paço never saw the completion of the initial project, which envisioned the construction of a second turret. The interior, which was subject to deep transformation, has large rooms, some of which are covered by high vaults. The main floor and the turret have a layout which, despite not being in the original, are drawn in a similar fashion to the interior of the Casa da Baía, by Maiorca (1637). The dome, ending with an artificial skylight, accommodates a shell in each corner, thus improving the acoustics of the turret room.



SOCIETY

By the 19th century, Casa do Paço had transformed into the focus of the social and club life of Figueira da Foz, having been the head office of various institutions and services, namely, a Theatre, Assembleia Figueirense, Ginásio Clube Figueirense, Grémio do Comércio da Figueira da Foz, and even the Municipal Museum, which was located there between 1894 and 1899, when it managed by Santos Rocha. But one of the most prominent events that took place at Casa do Paço was the reception given to the kings of Portugal, Dom Luís I and Dona Maria Pia, at the opening of the railway line of Beira Alta, in 1882.

